

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release June 22, 1973

Saults 202/343-5634

## ENDANGERED YUMA RAIL SURVEY BRINGS GOOD NEWS

A multiagency task force on an endangered bird species, the Yuma clapper rail, has encouraging information on numbers after a two-week desert survey on the Lower Colorado River, its Mexican delta, the Salton Sea and the lower reaches of the Gila River.

Covering 320 miles of river, the southern Salton Sea and part of the delta, 20 skilled observers waded, boated and walked to record 900 of the Yuma rails. Roy Tomlinson, who coordinates endangered species studies in the Mexico-U.S. desert region for the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service, said this means "certainly more than 1,000" of these pale, small marsh birds are alive and well in the area.

The 1973 edition of "Threatened Wildlife of the United States," published two months ago by the Department of the Interior, quoted an earlier study showing 500 to 1,000 in this region, the only place where they occur.

The survey was planned by a Species Recovery team headed by Monte Dodson, FWS manager of the Southwestern Desert Refuges complex. Also on the team: Dick Todd of Arizona's Game and Fish Department, Howard Leach of California's Division of Fish and Game, Wayne Deason of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation, Gail Kobetich of Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Yuma rail were counted by personnel from those agencies, plus representatives of Colorado River Indian tribes and volunteers from the Audubon Society. Taped calls, originally recorded by Tomlinson, were used in the survey. Calls were broadcast for three minutes, then searchers listened for responses from the rails. Survey teams worked on the desert for 13 days, May 14-26, combining auditory and visual techniques in early mornings, when the rare birds were most active.

This variety of clapper has a limited range that has never been clearly mapped. Its eastern clapper rail cousin, a sort of salt-marsh hen, is plentiful and well known all along the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of Mexico. This rail is larger and darker, as befits a bird that lives in a tolerable climate with more water. Both varieties probably eat primarily shrimp, crayfish, crabs, insects and other animal life of their area, but the stark deserts of the Lower Colorado river basin have not encouraged intensive research on the Yuma rail.